



## **Lavinia Margaret Engle** **(1892-1979)**

***First woman from Montgomery County elected to the Maryland House of Delegates. First woman to serve on Montgomery County Board of Commissioners***

Lavinia Margaret Engle was born into a Quaker family in Forest Glen, Maryland in 1892. Her mother was involved in the suffrage movement. Her father was a Treasury Department official. Engle received her B.A. degree from Antioch College in Ohio in 1912, and did her graduate work at Johns Hopkins University where she was the first woman graduate student in political science. She received her doctorate degree in political science and economics.

Engle met Susan B. Anthony as a child and joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1913 as a field organizer. She marched with thousands of other women in Washington, D.C. and New York City demanding the vote for women. She also did public speaking, legislative work, and campaigning for the organization. During World War I, Engle helped organize the Suffrage Field Hospital, a unit staffed entirely by women. Following the war, she went to Europe with YMCA Canteen Service and helped run canteens in France, Belgium and occupied Germany. After the 19th amendment giving the right to vote to women was finally ratified in 1920, she campaigned in 16 states for the amendment's ratification. After the suffrage amendment was passed, the National American Woman's Suffrage Association was dissolved, and a new organization was created.

Engle was instrumental in the formation of the newly established National League of Women Voters whose mission was to help women effectively use their new political power and to integrate them into the existing political system. From 1920 to 1936, Engle served as the Executive Secretary of the Maryland League of Women voters, investigating a variety of social problems that inundated the state including the unsanitary migrant camps, public health issues, and inadequate child and maternal health standards, and lobbying for early maternal and infant bureau programs and other public health services.

In 1930, Engle, a long time Democrat, was elected as Montgomery County's first woman Delegate to the Maryland Assembly. During her four-year term, she successfully introduced a bill for unemployment insurance in 1933. Engle was the first woman to become a member of the Ways and Means Committee. She was also the first woman to serve on the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners. She chaired the Montgomery County Welfare Board and the State Planning Commission during the 1930s.

In 1932, Engle chaired the Speakers' Bureau for Franklin D. Roosevelt's first presidential campaign. In 1936, when the Social Security Act passed, Engle began her federal career. She was appointed Chief of the Division of Field Operations of the Social Security Board. In 1942 she was appointed Director of Region III in Washington, D.C. She was responsible for developing the plan for the regional organiza-

tion of the Department to include regional and district offices. Then in 1951 she became Assistant to the Commissioner of Social Security in charge of staff development. Engle held this position until 1963, when she joined the newly established Welfare Administration. Lavinia Engle retired in 1964, after 28 years of government service. After retirement, she continued her advocacy in the areas of medical care and housing for the aged. She served on the Montgomery County Commission on Aging in 1967 and continued as an active member of the League of Women Voters.

Engle received many honors during her career. She was awarded the Certificate of Distinguished Citizenship from the state of Maryland for her contributions to community and state, devotion to good government and pioneering efforts for the enlargement of freedom. She was granted the Susan B. Anthony Medal of the League of Women Voters for her contributions to the organization, and the Distinguished Service Award from the U.S. Civil Service Commission. She was a member of the American Political Science Association and the American Society for Public Administration. She was president of the Metropolitan chapter of Public Administration Society. Engle was inducted to the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 1989.

Lavinia Engle considered herself an "early crusader" for women's rights and believed that her best weapons were "justice, logic, and persuasion." Engle died in 1979, at the age of 87.

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#### **SOURCES:**

- The Montgomery County Historical Society Library
- Montgomery County Archives
- [www.ssa.gov/history/engle.html](http://www.ssa.gov/history/engle.html)
- [www.mmdarchives.state.md.us/msa/educ/exhibits/womenshall/html/whflilst.html](http://www.mmdarchives.state.md.us/msa/educ/exhibits/womenshall/html/whflilst.html)